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He Battled Men Of Steel Behind Iron Curtain

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A retired Army colonel in Morrisville has some frightening memories of post World War II days in Hungary, when he was seized by Russian Communist troops.

"The Communists lied whenever it met their purpose," said Peter James Kopcsak, Morrisville Park Apartments, "and they were never embarrassed when they were caught. This is still the case today."

Col. Kopcsak, All-American football player from West Point in both 1931 and '33, became assistant military attache in Budapest in 1947.

During the war Col. Kopcsak had seen plenty of action. Commanding an armored task force under Gen. George Patton in France, he had led the first unit to cross the Seille River, under heavy German mortar and artillery fire.

Peace Treaty

Now, in Hungary, he was required to find out if the Russians had withdrawn their troops according to the peace treaty.

He found himself accompanying the American peace treaty enforcement officer through the seemingly peaceful and beautiful Hungarian countryside. But the action was not all over.

"In the early part of '47 the British, Americans and Russians occupied Hungary through the Allied Control Commission. But when the peace treaty was signed, the commission dissolved, with the understanding that everyone would remove their troops from the country," he explained.

"There was a minor provision allowing the Russians to guard their rail connections between Russia and Austria. But they had much more in mind. The Communists competed in Hungary's free election and pulled only seven per cent of the votes. It was obvious that the Hungarians didn't want Communist rule."

Find Russian Troops

The serene and colorful countryside of Hungary was not to be enjoyed peacefully for long. Upon entering the little town of Gyor, Col. Kopcsak and the treaty enforcement officer found Russian troops. Worse than that, the Russian troops found them.

"The Communists accused us of spying, as it is forbidden for Americans to approach a Russian troop compound. The Russian major didn't seem to understand when I told him his troops were violating the treaty by being there. But when he phoned his headquarters in Budapest, he was ordered to release us."

Breezing through Szombathely, another town, the two American officers found another illegally stationed Russian Army division.

"We continued through West Central Hungary to the town of Papa where we found, as we had been led to suspect, a Russian fighter aircraft center."

Put In Prison

In Papa, however, the Russians were less willing to pretend their innocence. Col. Kopcsak and his friend were put in prison under tight security guard, as "spies."

"They wouldn't let us eat or use a toilet for 12 hours," he said, "They said they would take us to Budapest where we could be identified, but were really planning to put us in a Russian prison in Vienna."

Austria at the time was divided into the four Allied zones — American, Russian, British and French.

Luckily, the Russians got confused in Vienna and steered into the international zone.

"I saw a jeep party of four and yelled, so that the British and American military policemen came. The Russians tried to keep them away from the sedan. I was sandwiched between two guards, and the other officer was kept in another vehicle."

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